

REINDEER DAYS REMEMBERED. By ELISA J. HART with the assistance of Inuvialuit Co-researchers. Inuvik, Northwest Territories: Inuvialuit Cultural Resource Centre, 2001. ISBN 0-9683636-7-9. 112 p., map, b&w and colour illus., bib. Softbound. Cdn\$20.00 + \$5.00 p&h.

Before I became the lucky recipient of a copy of *Reindeer Days Remembered*, I was living the history of reindeer introductions to northern Canada in the grey tones of academic accounts. Now I am pleased to be privy to the Technicolor memories of the reindeer herders themselves. The text is centred on testimonials provided by former herders and their families, most of whom currently reside in Tuktoyaktuk and Inuvik. The book design and content do an admirable job of presenting historical accounts interspersed with an ample collection of photographs and diagrams. The book is appealing to a variety of audiences, including those the author hoped to capture: elders, high school students, and the general public.

Between 1935 and 1964, Saami families from Norway trained approximately 70 North American men (Inuvialuit, Alaskan Inupiat, Coronation Gulf Inuit, and Gwich'in) in reindeer herding techniques, with the goal of establishing locally owned and self-sustaining herds.

The historical description of the beginnings of the industry certainly whetted my appetite to learn more about Mangilaluk, the Inuvialuit leader who refused treaty arrangements with the Canadian government. Instead, he gave permission for reindeer to be introduced to the Mackenzie Delta in the 1930s to quell a meat shortage: caribou had been absent from the area for 60 years. Evidence of the boom of the reindeer industry in neighbouring Alaska drove government aspirations for the eventual success of a Native-owned reindeer industry in Canada. The Alaskans, however, had an "open" herding system—herds were allowed to range together, and individual herders assessed the state of their herds at an annual roundup—whereas the Canadian government promoted a "close" herding method, which required herders to move with their individual herds year-round. It was not until the 1960s that the government conceded that the "close" system was not viable. This book is full of herders' memories of the frustrations and the rewards of attempting to remain in contact with their animals throughout the year.

The longest time that a reindeer herd remained in Native hands in the Mackenzie Delta was a 10-year span (before 1964). Physical hardships and tough economic prospects made it too difficult for herders to get a running start in the industry. In the mid-1950s more economically rewarding opportunities arrived in the area, namely the DEW Line and oil exploration. Herding was considered a good economic option only when hunting conditions were poor and fur prices too low. However, some trappers felt that the reindeer exacerbated the difficulty of maintaining their livelihoods by trampling muskrat push-ups, thus further reducing slim economic opportunities during downturns in the fur market.

Herders' recollections of just how physically demanding the herding lifestyle could be are very telling. Not only did the

herders face many physical hardships, but they also faced many lonely days separated from their families—all for very little pay. Herders remember that there was a draconian policy in place that no tents were to be provided to herders in the fall months in order to "induce" them to keep moving with the herds. I kept flipping back to the map provided to remind myself of the distances these men were traveling, on foot during the summer months and on skis in the winter months, long before the arrival of snow machines.

The elders' starker memories are counterbalanced by warm accounts of the herding way of life, including hilarious stories of herders negotiating skis for the first time (wooden skis navigated using one pole rather than today's two-poled approach) as well as some vivid memories of the beauty of the land, and the personalities of individual reindeer.

I found that the text left me thirsty for answers to many questions, as any good educational tool should. For example, what enticed the Saami to come to Canada? Was it the physical hardships alone that discouraged local Mackenzie Delta men from pursuing a lifelong reindeer herding lifestyle? It would be interesting to see a second volume focused on herders' thoughts about just how different the herding way of life is from the hunting way of life. And did the herders incorporate their own caribou corral-building techniques into the Saami roundup techniques? The photo caption on page 42 alludes to the possible adoption of Gwich'in techniques. I was also curious to know more about the commercial sales of reindeer meat (estimated at 45.5% of total meat sales). Ironically, in the past, most local people could not afford to buy reindeer meat. Who was buying the commercially available meat? Finally, the communication between the herders, with their multiple mother tongues, could be a volume in itself.

The book displays tremendous production qualities. Herders' words are typeset to stand out from the rest of the text in such a way that they are almost personalized. Wonderfully evocative photos give the reader a real feeling for the conditions and the individuals involved. The quotations and photos give a vivid sense of the constant movement involved in close herding.

I would definitely recommend this book for reading by the intended audiences—and also by researchers who may be familiar with the details shared in academic journals, but who have yet to bring this history to life through the words of the herders who lived it. This book is that rare treasure: a documented history imbued with living breath.

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